

“A Fraternal Word” Examined

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INTRODUCTION

The enclosed pamphlet, *A Fraternal Word on the Questions in Controversy between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod*, prepared after our August 1953 convention by a committee of the Missouri Synod, was offered and given to some of our people before we had an opportunity in any way to examine its content. Despite the fact that the president of our Synod in a letter of Sept. 14, 1953, to the praesidium of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod protested the impropriety of the method employed in bringing "A Fraternal Word" to some of our people, its entire contents were published in the *Lutheran Witness* of Sept. 29, 1953, with the result that its misquotations and misrepresentations received wide dissemination.

When our Synod reconvened on October 8 and 9, 1953, at Bethesda Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, copies of *A Fraternal Word* were at my request provided for and distributed among the delegates present. At the same time a review of *A Fraternal Word*, prepared at the request of our Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, was submitted to the convention and to the Missouri representatives present. The review pointed out that our criticisms of the Common Confession are misquoted and misrepresented in *A Fraternal Word*, whereupon the Missouri Synod representative promised that the necessary corrections would be made.

In a further letter of October 29, 1953, to the president of the Synodical Conference, who had requested distribution on behalf of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the president of our Synod wrote:

"Since our objections to the Common Confession are not clearly and fully quoted in the brochure which pretends to answer all these objections, we deem it inadvisable to distribute the brochure without an accompanying word of caution.

"We therefore do stand ready to accept sufficient copies for our mailing list of pastors, professors, and teachers, about 1300 in all, and request that they be sent to the Northwestern Publishing House, 3616-32 West North Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wisconsin, in care of Professor E. Reim. He will then distribute them to our pastors and teachers."

These copies were received shortly before Christmas with a few minor corrections printed on the last page of the pamphlet. Copies of "A Fraternal Word" and the "Review" are herewith provided for your careful study.

In the name of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union

OSCAR J. NAUMANN, *President*

FOREWORD

At the special convention of our Synod, October 8-9, 1953, time was granted for distribution and discussion of a booklet issued by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, entitled "A Fraternal Word on the Questions in Controversy between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod." This document had already been distributed to the clergy of the Missouri, Slovak, and Norwegian Synods, as well as at two of our special District Conventions. It had also been published in the columns of the *Lutheran Witness*.

The discussion of October 9th was on the basis of duplicated copies of typewritten notes showing how by inaccurate and incorrect quotations and shifting of emphasis the *Fraternal Word* had actually misrepresented the position of the Wisconsin Synod. It was specifically stated that this does not necessarily imply a charge of deliberate intent. One of the results of the October discussion was a promise by one of the official representatives of the Missouri Synod who were present that a correction would be made.

There was no indication of the nature of the intended statement until December, when the arrival of copies for distribution in our Synod* showed an imprint on the last page listing certain items for correction. While this confirms the validity of our original complaint, we cannot grant that it rights the wrong that has been done. We draw attention to the following points.

1. These corrections are limited to technical details of printing and quotation. They ignore the bearing which these misquotations have on the substance of our argumentation. But this was and is the heart of the issue.
2. These corrections appear only on those copies of the *Fraternal Word* which are being sent out from now on, chiefly to members of our Wisconsin Synod. As far as we are able to ascertain, nothing has been done

*) By request of President Naumann. See his introductory remarks.

by the Missouri Committee to reach those members of the other Synods who received the original, uncorrected edition, or who read it in the *Lutheran Witness*. Our suggestion that a statement of regret be made in the *Lutheran Witness* has — up to the time of this writing — not been accepted.

3. These corrections concede technical errors, but hold fast to the ground gained by the original misrepresentation.

It has been agreed that the *Fraternal Word* together with an appropriate explanation is to be sent to all pastors, professors and teachers of our Synod, as well as to anyone else who may request it. In view of the inadequacy of the "Correction" that has been made, it has been decided to send as our companion piece the same notes which were distributed at Milwaukee, plus additional comment on the bearing which the misquotations of the *Fraternal Word* have on the substance of our argumentation, including also some items which for lack of time could not be considered in the October meeting. Even so, we shall content ourselves with touching on the chief points only.

The Standing Committee on
Church Union (Wisconsin Synod)
E. REIM, Secretary

"A FRATERNAL WORD" EXAMINED

After an introduction expressing deep concern at the latest developments within the Synodical Conference and at the same time promising a discussion "in a spirit of fraternal candor" this document refers to the conviction still held by Missouri "that the Common Confession represents a settlement of the doctrinal differences which have hitherto divided it from the American Lutheran Church." Presenting the objections recorded by the Wisconsin Synod officially, particularly in its Convention Proceedings of 1951 (New Ulm), it seeks to "show how The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has sought to meet these objections."

The purpose of this brief study is to test this document at some of the most important points, and particularly as to its "fraternal candor." A comparison in parallel columns follows. For the sake of convenience we shall use abbreviations: "FW" for *Fraternal Word*, "CC" for Common Confession, "ALC" for American Lutheran Church.

I. The Common Confession

Fraternal Word

1. The Wisconsin Synod has declared that the Common Confession is "inadequate" in the following points (Wis. Syn. Proceedings 1951, p. 147).

Wisconsin Proceedings, 1951

Resolution No. 2 (p. 147): "that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted (cf. Review of the Common Confession), but that we also hold that the adoption . . . creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled."

By failing to note the second part of our New Ulm Resolution at this point, the FW sets up a false standard for the comparison which it now undertakes. For by merely stating that our Synod declared it inadequate and failing to state that our Synod declared it inadequate *as a settlement of past controversies* the reader is not put into a position to judge the adequacy properly. The passing reference on page 10 to this second part of our resolution comes too late, for by this time the reader has already been guided to a conclusion concerning the adequacy of the CC without taking this point into consideration.

The method of the "Fraternal Word" becomes even more unfair by the way in which the statements of our New Ulm Report are misrepresented, sometimes by false emphasis, sometimes by the omission of some very important parts. We also find the explanation of the "Fraternal Word" concerning its own emphasis ("italics" — p. 4, middle) to be misleading, since it implies that the emphasis in the sections on Justification and Conversion must ours. A comparison of our 1951 Proceedings will show that this is not the case.

For the convenience of our readers we shall make a comparison here, printing in the left-hand column a specific section just as it appears in the FW, including the underlined emphasis and placing beside it the same quotation as it appears in our Wisconsin Proceedings of 1951, with our emphasis in bold face and the omissions indicated by *italics*.

A. Justification

Fraternal Word

a) Wis. Syn. Proceedings, 1951, pp. 128-129: "Any clear and correct presentation of this article requires a clear statement that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has already declared every sinner righteous in His sight."

Wisconsin Proceedings, 1951

Review of the Common Confession, p. 129: "Any clear and correct presentation of this article requires *not merely the inclusion of the term 'objective justification,'* but a clear statement that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has already declared every sinner righteous in His sight."

For a proper evaluation of the sections of the Common Confession which are quoted in the "Fraternal Word" in order to show how our objections have been met, the following paragraph of our Review should also be noted:

"This truth is impaired when the article states that forgiveness 'has been secured and provided for all men.' For this still leaves room for the thought that the justification of the sinner is not complete until the missing factor of personal (subjective) faith is supplied, a thought which is even suggested in the Article by its description of justification as taking place on the basis of 'Christ's righteousness, *which He imputes to the sinner through the Gospel and which the sinner accepts by faith.*'" (Here the emphasis was ours.)

B. Conversion

Fraternal Word

a) Wis. Syn. Proceedings, 1951, pp. 129-130: "A clear and correct presentation of the doctrine of conversion must include a rejection of the untenable distinction between a natural and a wilful resistance of man. We note that the Common Confession not only fails to include such

Wisconsin Proceedings, 1951

Review of the Common Confession, p. 129-130: "*In view of past controversies on this subject* a clear and correct presentation of the doctrine of Conversion must include a rejection of the untenable distinction between a natural and a wilful resistance of man, *as well as of any other*

a specific rejection, but that its positive wording does not exclude the thought of man's preparing himself for conversion by his refraining from such wilful resistance"

attempt at explaining the mystery '*cur alii prae aliis?*' (Cf. Brief Statement, Art. 12-14.)

"We note that the Common Confession not only fails to include such a specific rejection, but that its positive wording does not exclude the thought of man's preparing himself for conversion by his refraining from such wilful resistance."

C. Election

Fraternal Word

a) Wis. Syn. Proceedings, 1951, pp. 130-131: "A correct presentation of this important doctrine must include

1) a clear and unmistakable statement that this election is an election unto faith (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13);

2) the positive assurance that this election is a cause of our salvation and what pertains thereto (Trgl. 1065 No. 8 — Rom. 8:28-30; Jn. 10:27-29; cf. Jn. 6:65);

3) definite recognition of the certainly of this election ('which cannot fail or be overthrown' — Trgl. 1079 No. 45. Cf. also Mt. 24:24; Jn. 10:27-29; Romans 8:28-30. 38f).

These vital and indispensable statements are, however, not to be found in this article of the Common Confession."

Wisconsin Proceedings, 1951

Here the quotation, though not complete, is correct as far as it goes, including an accurate reproduction of our emphasis. It fails, however, to mention a fourth point, which reads as follows:

"The article also falls short of confessional clarity by failing to state that God's eternal decree of election did not merely set up a description of those who will be saved, but means that He has chosen 'each and every person,' a specific number, unto faith and eternal life." (Personenwahl — Form. Conc. S. D. XI, No. 23; Brief Statement, Art. 39.)

That these omissions and this shifting of emphasis constitute an actual misrepresentation of our Wisconsin position by the FW has, we believe, been shown conclusively by the foregoing comparison. This is particularly true because of the way in which the FW outlines the method which it is following in presenting its case, stating on page 3a) that it would show — not merely *some* of the Wisconsin objections, but — “The objections recorded by the Wisconsin Synod.” Surely, this leads one to expect a fair statement of the Wisconsin position. Instead, we are served with a consistent understatement of our case.

The question still remains, however, whether these items have some important bearing on the actual issues, or whether our protest merely involves much ado about nothing.

In regard to the article on Justification our Review of the CC made it very clear (Wisconsin Report, 1951, page 128, par. 2) that we were not merely asking for the use of the word “declared” in a statement on justification, but that we were stressing the need of accepting this verdict of forgiveness for the sins of all men as a “*fertiges Gut*,” a ready blessing. We stated there we consider this essential for the preservation of the principle of “grace alone.” This was the heart of the matter and the point of our criticism. Yet this is the very point that the FW has avoided.

In discussing the CC article on Conversion we brought out the importance of taking the history of the controversy on this doctrine into account (Wis. Report, 1951, p. 129, VII). We called for a rejection of the distinction between a natural and a wilful resistance of unregenerate man, when this distinction is offered as the explanation for the mystery why some are converted, and others not. At this crucial point in the problem the FW diverts the attention of the reader to a side issue of terminology. Not only does it first misquote, and then answer us, but it does so when we are dealing with the very heart of the issue. If it were not for this, one could perhaps ignore the unfairness of the method. But as it stands our position is certainly being misrepresented.

Concerning the doctrine of Election we have granted that the FW has correctly quoted three points which we consider essential for a correct presentation of this important doctrine. We draw attention, however, to an additional paragraph which, in spite of its importance, is passed over by the FW. This paragraph not only introduces the matter of the Election of Persons (*Personenwahl*) as a point that is essential for a truly confessional presentation of the doctrine of Election, but also rejects the idea that God’s eternal decree merely sets up a

description of those who will be chosen and saved. Thus it not only provides a valuable supplement to the previous paragraphs, but constitutes a final test, enabling us to see in what sense the first three points of the present agreement are now meant by those who formerly taught otherwise.

How important Missouri once considered this last point of the doctrine appears from its own *Brief Statement*, where we read in Article 39: "Furthermore, by election of grace, Scripture does not mean that *one* part of God's counsel of salvation according to which He will receive into heaven those who persevere in faith unto the end, but, on the contrary, Scripture means this, that God, before the foundation of the world, from pure grace, because of the redemption of Christ, has chosen for His own a definite number of persons out of the corrupt mass and has determined to bring them, through Word and Sacrament, to faith and salvation."

Nevertheless, the paragraph from Part I on the CC, which is quoted at this point in order to show that our objections have been met, is the same one which contains the very terminology that is so definitely opposed by the *Brief Statement*. In fact, we find that this paragraph of the CC sometimes uses even the very words that were rejected by the *Brief Statement*.

In the foregoing we have summed up the chief points of remarks made at the October Convention on the basis of our comparison between the text of the New Ulm resolution and the manner in which they are quoted in the *Fraternal Word*. In the following we offer our comment on some of the other sections of this document, without, however, placing the two texts side by side. We follow the outline and page numbers of the W.

D. Means of Grace

(FW pages 6-7)

Under a) the FW mentions our comment made at New Ulm. We may say at this time that Part II of the CC reveals an obvious attempt to meet our objection, particularly with regard to the use of the term "verbal inspiration." This statement is quoted under point c) on page 7. We note, however, that the strong part of the statement ("the Holy Scriptures are *God's verbally inspired Word*") is followed by an explanatory clause ("that is . . .", etc.), which not only qualifies but weakens the previous strong statement. For, to say that "God moved men to write what He wanted recorded in the words He wanted employed" is just sufficiently vague to allow for the idea of a "limited revelation" and, therefore, a "limited

morality" in the Old Testament (see *Lutheran Standard*, 2/21/53, page 15, where this is given as the explanation for those Psalms in which David calls for God's judgment upon the foes of His kingdom). But this is one of the very departures from the true doctrine of Inspiration against which the CC should be an effective barrier.

In order to defend the CC against our criticism, the FW quotes at length from Part I. It will be noted, however, that this paragraph, page 7b), simply repeats the very section of the CC which we had analyzed in our "Review", and that it does so without taking any notice of what was said there concerning the phrases "content and fitting word" and "the Holy Scriptures in their entirety." We believe that our remarks were pertinent to the issue, and that the FW, therefore, simply fails to answer our argument.

Concerning points 1) and 2), we find it very strange to be charged with ignoring the fact that the phrase in question is in antithesis to the Reformed view concerning the Real Presence. After all, the CC is designed to settle differences between *Lutheran* church bodies. In that connection we have asked for antitheses to cover the specific issues in controversy. We frankly do not see the reason for suddenly introducing an antithesis against a *Reformed* view. But even if one were necessary, the words quoted would serve very poorly for such a purpose, since the idea of a Sacrament in which the true body and blood of Christ is received only by "the members of His Church" is definitely an expression of Reformed theology.

E. The Church

(FW pages 7-9)

What is said by the FW under point 1-b) on page 8 concerning the nature and work of the Church refers to things of which we were perfectly aware in writing our "Review" (Wis. Report, 1951, page 132, 1). We still hold to our opinion. For to maintain, as does the FW, that the positive statements concerning the gifts of Christ to the Church exclude "any possibility of taking the Church's 'duty' in the sense of an external compulsion," is to ignore the fact that our natural mind instinctively leans toward legalism, and that such legalistic ideas have indeed crept into the doctrine of the Church time and again. Our criticism was intended as a warning for which we believe there are very strong reasons.

Concerning point 2. Marks of the Church: In its Declaration of 1938 the ALC held that it is permissible to speak of

a visible side of the Church "*when defining its essence*" (our emphasis) if by this expression nothing else is meant but the use of the Means of Grace. Against this position our "Review" of 1951 contended that the term "Marks of the Church" is indispensable. The FW admits that the CC does not use this desirable term. At the same time, however, it calls this section of the CC a strong statement "*concerning the organic connection between the Church's existence and the use of the Means of Grace.*" (In both cases our emphasis.)

It seems to us that this statement actually favors the ALC claim that it is permissible when defining the *essence* of the Church (again our emphasis) to say that the use of the means of grace constitutes the visible side of the Church.

In discussing our point 3 on Church Fellowship the FW only states that "a profession of faith in word and deed is presupposed throughout." This answer ignores a very substantial part of our criticism, namely that in this discussion of Fellowship one dare not forget that the ALC has by official resolution committed itself to a policy of selective fellowship, and that, since it has not been specifically disavowed, this must be taken as the intended sense of the CC in the mind of at least one of the parties to the agreement. The FW has certainly not done justice to its avowed purpose as long as it leaves this vital subject untouched

F. Antichrist

(FW pages 9-10)

Under point b) our criticism is disposed of with a simple assertion that this question is dealt with adequately in the CC (our emphasis).

On the other hand, it is simply a fact that the view concerning the possibility of a further fulfillment of this prophecy concerning Antichrist has been defended by prominent teachers of the ALC. The reason which was given for this position is the claim that this is not a clear teaching of Scripture, but a matter of historical judgment. Since Missouri has also begun to use this terminology concerning the "historical judgment," the emphasis which is put on the word "climax" will be a feeble barrier against the spread of this old ALC opinion.

G. Sunday

(FW page 10)

Our "Review" of 1951 points to the doctrine of Sunday as a matter that has been in controversy up to recent date.

The FW states that it is *publica doctrina* in the ALC that the observance of Sunday does not rest on the command of God.

But evidently the contrary is also *publica doctrina* in the ALC as appears from the following quotation from a devotional book published by the Wartburg Press in 1950: "The law of God decrees that one day in every week all men must cease their normal work and must worship him . . . So our Father has commanded this 'way of life'." (From "Thine Forever" by August G. Suechting, page 41.)

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In the last three lines of point 2 on page 10 the FW furnishes the reader with a pre-fabricated verdict on its own efforts in the preceding pages. "Since, *as we have shown* (our emphasis), the inadequacy of the Common Confession, Part I, has not been proved, the charge falls and the demand cannot fairly be made."

This brings us back to the original question: Is the CC adequate as "a settlement of the doctrinal differences which have hitherto divided it (the Missouri Synod) from the American Lutheran Church"?

We believe that a careful examination of our original criticism, of the FW, and of our Examination of the latter will convince the reader that the FW has not proved its case.

II. Negotiations with the American Lutheran Church

(FW. pages 11-12)

On page 11 under point a) the FW pictures us as saying to Missouri: "You must suspend negotiations with ALC until ALC *has first settled* the matter of 'allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion, etc'." (Our emphasis.)

The FW must know that this is a misrepresentation, for in the second paragraph on the same page it correctly quotes us as saying that "the obstacle to the renewal of doctrinal discussions" will not have been removed "until the American Lutheran Church recognizes this as the basic problem which must first be considered and settled." To mention a matter that needs to be recognized as the first one that must be settled in discussion with a certain body is surely not the same thing as saying that this matter must be settled before there can be any discussion with that body.

By this device the FW has created a false basis for its entire subsequent argument, on this and the following page.

"BOY SCOUTS"

(FW, page 13-18)

- A. In printing the entire report of the Synodical Conference Committee on Scouting "A Fraternal Word" does briefly present our Synod's objection to Scouting and the Missouri Synod's defense of its stand on Scouting.
- B. Its historical review of the issue of Scouting, because of its many significant omissions, does, however, not bring out the utterly fruitless nature and outcome of eight years of negotiations on this issue.
1. It ignores the facts which show that up to 1941 the Missouri Synod by official resolution still found objectionable features in the Scout organization.
 2. It says nothing of the fact that in the official discussions of the Intersynodical Relations Committee, 1944-1948, the points of controversy, the Wisconsin Synod's objections, and the Missouri Synod's defense of its stand had already been clearly set forth.
 3. It says nothing of the unwillingness of the Missouri Synod officials to carry out the Synodical Conference resolution of 1946 that this Intersynodical Relations Committee provide pastors, teachers, and interested laymen with material pro and con on the Boy Scout question. (Cf. page 18, first line.)
 4. It says nothing of "A Study of Boy Scoutism," which was before the Missouri Synod Convention of 1947 in the form of an unprinted memorial from our Union Committee, but which was not brought to the attention of the delegates of this convention.
 5. *It makes no mention of the committee authorized by the 1947 Convention of the Missouri Synod to negotiate with a comparable committee of the Wisconsin Synod, and says nothing of the work of these committees during the next triennium or of the fact that the outcome of these negotiations was identical with that of the discussion in the Intersynodical Relations Committee.*
 6. It says nothing of the fact that upon the report of its committee at the 1950 Convention of the Missouri Synod, this convention, without any information concerning the nature of our objections to Scouting, reaffirmed the Missouri Synod's 1944 resolutions on Scouting.

7. In presenting the 1952 Synodical Conference resolutions on Scouting it does not make the uninformed reader aware of the fact that these resolutions were not the fruit of the labors and hearings of the pertinent floor committee but the unevaluated proposals of an individual delegate, which were adopted over the nay votes of the Wisconsin Synod delegates (the 77 nay votes even included other delegates).
 8. It does not make the reader aware of the fact that also in the one meeting held by the new committee of theological faculty members the points of controversy and the argumentation on both sides of the issue have remained those already established by the three previous forums of discussion of the issue of Scouting.
 9. It says nothing concerning the treatment which the issue of Scouting received at the Houston Convention: that this convention in none of its resolutions gave any recognition to our Synod's formal request that the Missouri Synod reverse its resolutions on Scouting, though this request was committed to two floor committees; that at this convention not as much as a mention was made either of the Synodical Conference Committee on Scouting which had labored during the past triennium and terminated its work with a divided report, or of the new committee of theological faculty members; that in answer to a memorial from a congregation in its own midst the Houston Convention did, however, reaffirm its 1944 position on Scouting.
- C. These omissions make it impossible for the uninformed reader to evaluate the two concluding paragraphs of "A Fraternal Word" concerning the issue of Scouting.

THE CHAPLAINCY

(FW pages 19-20)

The FW is right in stating that this question is now in the hands of a committee of the faculties of the theological seminaries, acting jointly, and appointed by resolution of the Synodical Conference Convention of 1952.

In view of the fact that this committee has had but one meeting to date, and that this same issue has previously lain dormant in another committee from 1946 to 1952, the plea that this committee "be given due time to carry out the request of the Synodical Conference" has a hollow ring.

COOPERATION IN SERVICE CENTERS

(FW pages 21-22)

Our criticism refers to these Service Centers as they were and are being conducted, not to Centers as they would be if every safeguard were carefully observed. We have, through the agency of the Intersynodical Relations Committee, provided the Praesidium of the Missouri Synod with specific instances where these principles were violated. But as far as we could determine, our efforts to secure a correction of the offense have been without results.

JOINT PRAYER AT INTERSYNODICAL CONFERENCES

(FW page 23)

This is indeed another piece of unfinished business. We believe, however, that the claim that the quoted resolution does not violate Romans 16:17 because (our emphasis) *it does not set up a fellowship relation* implying denial of truth or support of error, [provides an explanation for the rapid increase in instances of obviously unionistic "joint prayers." Being only "occasional" instances, they are explained away by the argument that they have not "set up" such a false relation, have in fact not set up any "relation."]

The argument may sound absurd, but we have heard it used.

OTHER CASES OF ALLEGEDLY UNIONISTIC PRACTICE

(FW page 24)

For evidence concerning the fruits of the Communion Agreement see *Quartalschrift*, 1952, page 61. Our point is not so much that such an incident could happen, — a joint communion service of chaplains under the leadership of a Missouri chaplain, in spite of the fact that the participants were of other National Lutheran Council and Lutheran World Federation bodies — but that to this date no official rebuke or correction has been made public.

CONCLUSION

We agree fully with the thoughts expressed in the second half of this closing word, concerning the manner of giving and receiving fraternal admonition. We regret, however, that the misrepresentations occurring in the previous pages of the FW have compelled us to set the record straight, lest those of our readers who have not ready access to the necessary documents for comparison be misled as to the truth concerning the intersynodical situation.

We believe that only by a full and frank facing of the facts of the present crisis can there be a beginning of healing this deplorable breach. We pray that our present words may be received in this spirit.